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~ 'Want It Now' A Hit!   ~ People Are Talking!   ~ Netscape 8.0 Out!

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->From the Editor's Keyboard   "Saying it like it is!"
   """"""""""""""""""""""""""""

It's hard to believe that Memorial Day is rapidly approaching! Where has
our spring gone? I don't even have my gardens ready yet. Then again, maybe
that's due to four rainy weekends in a row! Oh well, the sun will have to
make an appearance during a weekend soon enough.

As I've mentioned in some past issues, I've been doing some reminiscing off
and on about some great Atari memories. And, I promised to bring back some
of those memories in future issues of A-ONE. Well, this week, I'll start
some flashbacks of the AtariFest scenes of the past. Probably one of my
fondest memories of an AtariFest are of the numerous WAACE shows that I
attended during the early 90's. Those 8+-hour drives down to Reston,
Virginia were just the start of some terrific weekends. In this week's
issue, I'll start to bring back some of the reports of some of those shows,
as well as other Atari memories. I hope that these flashbacks bring back
some great feelings for good times from the past.

Until next time...

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->A-ONE User Group Notes! - Meetings, Shows, and Info!
   """""""""""""""""""""""""

                        WAACE - A REAL WINNER!
                        ======================

 by Dan Stidham

Whether or not Atari Corp would openly admit it, the WAACE Atarifest
'90 was almost universally looked upon as a bench mark for the
future success of Atari's ST/TT line of computers in the United States.
Although to say it was 'do or die' time might have been overrating the

importance of this premier east coast Atari event, many developers
were looking to WAACE to provide an accurate barometer on the health of
the US marketplace so as to take appropriate action in mapping out
future strategies. I'm quite sure that Russ Brown, J.D. Barnes, Charles Smeton
and the volunteer
corps of WAACE were well aware that this show would somehow
blossom to full maturity before the eyes of a hopeful and loyal
Atari community nationwide.

The stage was set. After being excluded from the Adult
Education Program that they had previously taken advantage of to
stage previous WAACE shows at a local high school, WAACE organizers
went ahead boldly with plans to move the show to a hotel convention
center, the Sheraton Reston International Center. Talk about turning
lumps of coal into diamonds or lemons into lemonade.
Twenty-thousand square feet of exhibition space, 950 free parking
spots(the State of Virginia has a law that every room has to have its
own parking spot), 500 rooms, tennis and basketball courts, picnic
areas surrounded by lush vegetation, nautilus, swimming, an extremely
friendly and helpful staff, etcetera. You could almost hear the
orchestra pit tuning up and the audience murmuring expectantly just
before the curtains rise.

The show was a smashing success, critically acclaimed by the
most finicky of prognosticators. Over 3600 Atari faithful made the
pilgrimage and lined the pockets of those with a stake, not only with
good to excel- lent sales but with, more importantly, renewed hope in
the vitality and verve of the market place. Most developers, at
least the ones I spoke with, were very satisfied with the response. I
spied Charles Johnson and John Eidsvoog of Codehead Software, producing
 extra copies of their hot new product, CodeKeys, on the fly to meet
exceeding customer demand--and this on the first day of the show.
Charles reported great sales. Chet Walters of WizWorks Software
declared that the show exceeded all goals and expectations he had set
for WizWorks, and that he and his staff now face the interesting
dilemma of either retiring on the profits or continuing to churn
out great software for the fun of it (just kidding). WizWorks and
Dr. Bobware were demoing the sensational MugShot and MVG, the
graphics manipulation tool extraordinaire. Gribnif Software reported
brisk sales of Neodesk 3. Although it is not being distributed as of
yet nationwide, for the WAACE show Gribnif made special arrangements
with Toad Computers to sell show special copies at fifty dollars apiece.

Upon arrival at the Sheraton Reston on friday evening, WAACE
organizers held a special reception in a small banquet room for
vendors and developers. The show itself encompassed all of the 20,000
square feet of convention exhibition area as there were no other events
scheduled for the weekend.   This meant that the entire convention
wing was filled with developer booths, demonstration rooms for such
computing specialties as MIDI, DTP, games, etc. WAACE handed out
attractively laid out and bound programs for showgoers.   In this
program they had a professionally rendered layout of the entire
show, pointing out areas of interest to the showgoer.

Atari's presence was very strong and not just confined to a large
main display area where they demo'ed the STe, the Mega ST4 DTP
workstation, an Atari PC with a portfolio card drive attached, and
several Lynxes. They had one of the smaller meeting rooms set-up as a
complete Lynx playground with several stations set-up around the room,
attractively and professionally designed. At each station two

children/adults could play individually or compete via the ComLynx
cable. This was a very busy room. Atari also put on two seminars, one
with User Group Coordinator and Vice President Bob Brodie and another
very interesting and revealing seminar with the software development
team of John Townsend, Ken Badertscher, and Cary Gee. Ken revealed to a
packed room the intricacies that are involved in releasing a new
version of TOS. He also came out of the closet with the dope on the STe
bug, TOS 1.6 booting problems, and other faux pas. The talk was
humorous and revealed a very human side to the technical goings-on
at Atari. Ken, Gary and John came across very personable, willing to
answer ALL questions and showed great personality throughout.

GEnie unveiled Aladdin for the Atari ST and was giving demos
constantly, explaining its completely GEM driven interface. Timothy
Purves, the author of the ST version of Aladdin, did a lot of the
demos himself and revealed that the project had been three months in
the making and would be completely ready for downloading by the
end of the second week of October. Let me say this and maybe it will
sum up the impact of this release--from what I saw,
telecommunicating has finally befriended the friend of the user, the
graphical interface, GEM on the Atari ST. Nearly every application
for use on the ST has a thoroughbred GEM entry into the marketplace,
and with Aladdin, modeming wears the GEM ring also. Understand
that Aladdin isn't merely a navigator for use with your existing
telecommunications software package, its a complete modeming tool
whose many powerful tools include built-in zmodem protocol (how
about that!). Darlah Pine, Jeff Williams, JJ Kennedy, and Neil Harris
were also on hand to demo Aladdin and man a large booth in the main
hall that also included aerial modem battles and other features of
GEnie and its Star Services.

Best Electronics was there selling their usual potpourri of
electronic parts to repair or enhance your present ST system. Of note
they also were selling the Megamater Cable by Sprokits, a cable that
allows a 520 to be attached to a Mega ST keyboard by unplugging the
internal keyboard from its connector and plugging in the Megamater
cable with the Mega ST telephone jack on the other end.

Frontier Software came all the way from Britain and was displaying
and selling their X-tra Ram memory expansion module as well as their
Forget me Clock, a cartridge clock that allows for attachment of another
cart via a pass through port. I found the ram expansion board
particularly interesting. Its installation appeared completely
painless with no soldering and after selling 8,000 of these units in
Europe they reported no problems. Show special on the expansion board
to 2.5 megs was $79, regular price being $89.

Gadgets by Small was present and showing their 68030 expansion
board up close and personal. They had it installed in a Mega ST and
had the cover off so that showgoers could inspect it to their hearts
content. A unfortunate accident erased programs on a hard disk that
was loaded with programs designed to show its compatibility, but I was
able to boot up my newly purchased Wordflair program and it ran
flawlessly. Doug Wheeler who helped man the booth with Dave and
Sandy Small, stated that the 68030 board, dubbed the 68030 SST, may be
out by the end of the year or early next year.   It boasts 12
megabytes fastRAM turning your Mega into a Mega 12, that's at the
optimum as its memory expansion function allows 8 more megabytes,
boosting your Mega 4 to 12. Gadgets claimed that most programs written
for the St will run, by and large, just fine on the 68030 SST.

Fast Technology's Jim Allen was also there showing Turbo 16 and
his own 68030 expansion module. Jim's expansion module will require
Turbo 16 to operate. Speaking of Turbo 16, Jim had good news for
Moniterm and other large screen monitor owners. Turbo 16   will now
cache screen memory for the larger screen monitors off of the solo
expansion port inside the Mega. Jim reported that the speed
increase is incredible. I'm getting it in about two weeks and I'll let
you know how it turned out.

Charles Smeton was also demonstrating his new Joppafax modem
at an incredibly low price of $139 for the modem, fax capabilities and
software to run the fax. Presently the fax only sends documents. Some
of the many incredible features are   drivers for PageStream, Calamus
and other apps that allows the document to be saved in a faxable format.
 And all of this for the price of the modem!   Charles announced that
 soon, his product would have receiving capabilities for an upgrade cost
of $80. I saw many people taking Charles up on his product and
purchasing it. Good luck with this one Charles. Looks like a real
winner.

 Of course there were the usual other faithful developers showing
their latest updates and releases. It seemed as though anyone who was
anyone as a developer, with few exceptions, was present in banquet
room G at the Sheraton Reston this past weekend.   ICD was showing
its line of AdScsi adapters and their new AdSpeed ST accelerator. ICD
promises to support it until, as they say in their literature passed
out at the show, it will be the best of its kind, it will be a good
value and it will be fully and enthusiastically supported. Its
installation promises no jumper wires, no mouse, I/O or blitter
conflicts, software selectable speed adjustments(on the fly), and
many other features, including full compatibility with everything
under the Atari sun (excluding those tenacious 8 bit machines of
course).   Goldleaf was there with Lauren Sellers and Craig Daymon,
demoing Wordflair and giving hints about their impending Wordflair
II release.

Before I shove off I thought I might mention that Atari was
giving attractive Lynx tee shirts away for the asking.   They were
also passing out little balsam wood airplanes with the words,
"Atari Flying High" printed on them. My two little girls gave a big
thumbs up to them and felt that they were a good omen of things to
come--but what do two little girls know? More encouraging was the
giant thumbs up given by nearly 4,000 showgoers in the direction of
the faithful core of developers in the US.

                        Til next time!

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                    PEOPLE ARE TALKING
                   compiled by Joe Mirando
                     joe@atarinews.org

[Editor's note: Due to a battle between Joe and the Usenet this week (guess
who won?!), Joe's column will not appear this week.]

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->In This Week's Gaming Section   - Playstation 3 Is Unveiled!
  """"""""""""""""""""""""""""""""   Xbox 360 In 2006!
                                      Power Out at E3!
                                      And much more!

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->A-ONE's Game Console Industry News   - The Latest Gaming News!
  """"""""""""""""""""""""""""""""""""

                 Sony Set to Unveil New PlayStation 3

Gamers awaited details of Sony Corp.'s new PlayStation 3 video game machine
Monday in what is likely a new round of console wars with rivals Microsoft
Corp. and Nintendo Co.

Sony officials was to tout Cell - ultra-fast processors jointly developed
by Sony and Toshiba Corp. - as a way to deliver games with ever more
realistic, movie-like graphics.

The chip's designers have said Cell can deliver 10 times the performance of
today's standard PC processors.

The announcement comes two days ahead of the Electronic Entertainment Expo,
an annual industry gathering in Los Angeles.

Last week, Microsoft showcased its new Xbox 360 in a 30-minute special on
MTV.

Microsoft said it would begin selling Xbox 360 in North America around
Thanksgiving, and Europe and Asia by the end of the year. Officials at Sony
and Nintendo have suggested their consoles will launch sometime next year.

No pricing details have been announced on any of the systems.

Microsoft planned a news conference Monday evening, and Nintendo will
discuss its new console, code-named Revolution, further on Tuesday morning.

In 2004, Sony's older PlayStation 2 led the U.S. console wars with 43
percent of the market, according to Jupiter Research. The original Xbox was
a distant No. 2 with 19 percent, followed by Nintendo's GameCube at 14
percent. The remainder included handheld game systems.

But by 2010, Xbox 360 would grab the lead with 38 percent of the market,

followed by Sony with 32 percent and Nintendo with 22 percent, Jupiter forecasts.

Microsoft is taking an entertainment hub approach with Xbox 360.

The curvy, white machine plays DVD movies and lets users listen to music, view photos and do real-time video chats with friends and relatives around the world.

The Xbox 360 features three processors, a removable 20-gigabyte hard drive, a custom graphics chip and built-in wireless for cable-free access to the company's Xbox Live online multiplayer service.

Nintendo To Launch New Game Console in 2006

Nintendo Co. said on Monday it planned to launch its new videogame console sometime next year, missing the key 2005 holiday shopping season and putting it a step behind Microsoft Corp. in the race to market a next-generation game machine.

Microsoft announced last week that its new console, Xbox 360, would be in stores in time for the 2005 year-end shopping season, likely giving it a head-start on both of its main rivals if, as industry watchers widely predict, Sony Corp. also introduces its new console in 2006.

Nintendo has not yet officially set a date for its new console, code-named Revolution, but said it would give further details at the annual Electronics Entertainment Expo, or E3, in Los Angeles this week. "It is true that we plan to launch Revolution in 2006. We will offer more details at the E3," a Nintendo spokesman said.

Based in the ancient Japanese capital of Kyoto, Nintendo was the dominant brand in home videogame consoles for much of the 1980s and early 1990s, until Sony entered the market with its PlayStation and Microsoft later introduced its Xbox machine.

Nintendo has said that Revolution will be ready for wireless Internet gaming and be compatible with the current generation GameCube, which is now in third place in the console market behind PlayStation 2 (PS2) and the Xbox.

The new console will be powered by a chip developed by IBM code-named Broadway and a graphics processor from ATI Technologies Inc. code-named Hollywood.

In a release on its U.S. Web site, Nintendo said Revolution would use 12 cm optical disks along with the 8 cm disks for the GameCube and be about the thickness of three DVD cases stacked together.

New Consoles Raise Stakes for Video Game Industry

The bright side of dying a horrible death in a video game is that resurrection is only a button hit away, but for game developers facing a steep upward spiral in costs, there may not be room for a second bad move.

Two companies with some of the deepest pockets in the world - Microsoft Corp. and Sony Corp.

At this week's Electronic Entertainment Expo, the video game industry's annual trade show known as E3, the immense cost of creating games with movie-quality graphics and unparalleled processing speeds was seen potentially wiping out some companies.

"Some developers are scared. They are as white as ghosts," said Ankarino Lara, a director of online gaming site GameSpot.

Within the next 18 months, Microsoft, Sony and Nintendo Co. Ltd. each plans to launch its next generation game console, Microsoft's Xbox 360, Sony's PlayStation 3 and Nintendo's Revolution.

That raises the technology bar for every developer in the $10 billion industry, and some may not be able to pay the hefty price.

The development cost of a high-end game, now about $10 million, could rise to $15 million to $20 million in the next five years, said Doug Lowenstein, president of industry trade group Entertainment Software Association.

"I think any developer or publisher without a lot of capital is not going to be very successful competing in the next five years of this market," he said. The industry defied one business trend, he added: "When we introduce new technology, it becomes more expensive to compete."

Even the world's largest game publisher Electronic Arts Inc. said it is feeling the pinch on its earnings.

"If you look at the balance sheet and profit and loss numbers, it doesn't always look that pretty. We're spending an awful lot of money right now to do all the heavy lifting," said John Schappert, the head of EA's biggest game studio.

The ability to make those investments could ultimately widen the gap between big players like EA and a huge community of small privately owned developers ill prepared to handle the ups and downs of a hit-driven industry.

But that would just be a case of history repeating itself.

Once proud names like Japan's Hudson Soft, known for classic games like "Bomber Man" and "Bonk's Adventure," and U.S. publisher Acclaim Entertainment Inc. are cited by analysts as victims of the previous console cycle.

Konami Corp. agreed to acquire Hudson Soft last month, while Acclaim filed for Chapter 7 bankruptcy in 2004 after a series of disappointing software titles that failed to match the popularity of past hits, such as "NBA Jam."

The cost of creating next generation games, and the risk of an expensive flop has drawn parallels to another pillar of the entertainment industry, Hollywood.

"It's going to become like the movie industry. Game publishers will spend big money. If something looks mediocre, then it will be killed even it's already in development," said Naoya Tsurumi, chief executive of Sega of America Inc.

But similar to Hollywood, good talent is in high demand.

Most major game publishers are out shopping for game developers that can maximize the power and speed of the new consoles along with the ability to create games that appeal to what is expected to be a larger, more diverse audience.

Activision Inc. said it plans to increase the number of in-house game developers by up to 30 percent from 1,000 this business year.

"This industry has grown so quickly. There are not enough bodies out there to fulfill all the development needs," said Kathy Vrabeck, president of Activision Publishing.

Wedbush Morgan analyst Edward Woo, speaking at an E3 workshop, said in the search for creative talent, don't overlook another important personnel decision.

"A key member to add to the team is a very good accountant," said Woo.

Illinois Senate OKs Video Game Restrictions

The Illinois Senate approved a version of Gov. Rod Blagojevich's proposed restrictions on the sales of violent and sexually explicit video games to children, even though some senators said the idea is unconstitutional.

The measure approved Thursday would require store owners to determine which games are too violent or sexually explicit for anyone under 18. Anyone selling them to a minor could be fined.

Both chambers have now approved the video game restrictions, but the Senate version removed the possibility of jail time for offenders. That means the revised bill now goes back to the House.

The sponsor, Sen. Deanna Demuzio, denied the measure would interfere with free speech rights.

"Video games are not art or media," she said. "They are simulations, not all that different from the simulations used by the U.S. military in preparation for war."

But other senators said the courts have already struck down similar laws elsewhere. They predicted the Senate-approved measure would never take effect and the state would end up paying hundreds of thousands of dollars in legal fees.

Still, even some critics said they would not vote against the measure for fear it would be used against them politically.

"I'm going to vote for this bill, but I'm voting for it for one reason - because this is a political bill," said Sen. Mike Jacobs. "If I vote against it, it will show up in a campaign mail piece."

Atari's 'Driver' Franchise Set to Break New Ground In 2006

The video game franchise that defines the action-driving genre and is the standard for interactive Hollywood car chases is back as Atari, Inc. announced that the next game in the Driver series is currently in development by its award-winning studio, Reflections Interactive.

The Driver brand is a global phenomenon that has achieved sales in excess of 11 million units worldwide. The new title is scheduled to ship in early 2006 for play on the Xbox video game system from Microsoft, PlayStation2 computer entertainment system and personal computer.

"Backed by a distinct driving dynamic that gave rise to a completely new sub-category within the driving genre, and with millions of fans worldwide, it is no surprise that the Driver franchise is often called the 'father of action driving games'," said Marc Metis, senior vice president of Marketing. "With our next Driver game, we are concentrating on those qualities that defined the franchise and established it as a perennial best-seller."

Without yet revealing details, the brand will return to its game play roots with a highly sophisticated, adrenaline-pumping car chase AI and unprecedented vehicle dynamics and physics. The new game is set in a photorealistic interpretation of New York City, features a seamless open mission structure integrated around a central storyline, and will be one of the first games of the genre to incorporate online play for console versions.

Power Outage Mars Start of Electronic Expo

It is hard to hold a video game trade show during a power failure, as attendees of the Electronic Entertainment Expo learned the hard way on Wednesday, just as the show was getting underway.

The power went out to mainly the media and administrative facilities at the Los Angeles Convention Center, though it was available on the show floor where games publishers, developers and hardware makers had set up their booths, said Carolyn Rauch, vice president of the Entertainment Software Association.

"The power outage stemmed from a problem with the city's power grid. We're working with them to rectify it as soon as possible," Rauch said.

The Los Angeles Department of Water and Power said the cause was still undetermined, but about 10 percent of the show facilities had no power at late morning. A crew was delivering a backup transformer to the Convention Center, which was expected to have full electricity back by 4 p.m. PDT.

The E3 gathering is the gaming industry's top deal-making and media event, with thousands of participants congregating each year in Los Angeles to learn about the latest and greatest in gaming.

This year, the top gaming console makers, Microsoft Corp., Sony Corp., and Nintendo Co. Ltd. unveiled their latest-generation consoles.

Vendors said they were struggling because of the partial outage.

"We can't do any of the lighting or music effects, we can't demonstrate any of our products," said Dirk Foster, director of marketing for video game accessory maker Pelican, who added that his company had planned to conduct demos in some of the meeting rooms off the show floor.

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->A-ONE Gaming Online   -   Online Users Growl & Purr!
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                    CLASSIC GAMING EXPO RETURNS TO E3

              History of Videogames Exhibit set to rock Kentia Hall

VALLEY STREAM, NEW YORK - May 13, 2005 - CGE Services Corporation, organizers of Classic Gaming Expo, today announced that they will be returning to E3 with their acclaimed 'History of Videogames' exhibit. CGE staff will be on hand to answer questions about the upcoming eighth-annual Classic Gaming Expo that will take place August 20 and 21, 2005 in San Francisco, and to remind show-goers of the rich history of video gaming that is often overlooked in today?s fast-paced gaming industry.

"We're thrilled to be returning to E3 this year," said John Hardie, founder of Classic Gaming Expo. "E3 is the video game industry's biggest show and we?re proud of the fact that Classic Gaming Expo has been recognized as the premier show dedicated to the preservation and celebration of video game history. E3 is the perfect forum for us to show people the importance of archiving and preserving video game history for future generations of gamers."

Sponsored by TechnoSource USA and Intellivision Productions, the Classic Gaming Expo exhibit will encompass over 2,000 square feet in Kentia Hall and will be open for visitors all three days of the May 18 - 20, 2005 E3 show. Last year's 'History of Videogames' exhibit garnered some of the top awards handed out at E-3 including 'Best of Show' by PC World Magazine and the #2 spot in G4 TV's 'Achievements in Booth Design.' "Show-goers can expect to see all of the features they loved from last year?s exhibit," said Hardie. "We're bringing back the arcade machines and home consoles as well as the 80?s living rooms and D.J." CGE show organizers welcome appointments with press, exhibitors and potential sponsors.

Classic Gaming Expo 2005 will take place at the spectacular Hyatt Regency Hotel in Burlingame, Calif. the weekend of August 20 and 21. This is the first time CGE will be held in San Francisco. As the show has grown in popularity and attendance, show co-organizers John Hardie, Sean Kelly and Joe Santulli made the decision to move the show to a larger venue while still maintaining a family-friendly and intimate atmosphere near San Francisco.

Classic Gaming Expo is open to anyone with an interest in video games -
both classic and modern. Information on attendance, ticketing and past
events is available at www.cgexpo.com.

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                      A-ONE's Headline News
                The Latest in Computer Technology News
                    Compiled by: Dana P. Jacobson

                 Congress Questions Pending Spyware Bill

Even as they move rapidly toward taking action against malicious software
programs in the next few weeks, federal lawmakers recognize that any move
they make will likely have a limited effect on the huge problem of spyware.

Fearing that a pending anti-spyware bill, the Spyblock Act, could
inadvertently hamper legitimate downloadable products, software makers are
busy lobbying for legislation that would pre-empt myriad state initiatives
under way.

Earlier this month, Microsoft Corp. Chairman and Chief Software Architect
Bill Gates was on Capitol Hill talking to lawmakers about a market-driven
approach to battling spyware-an approach that has won a number of adherents
in Congress.

As an alternative to the Spyblock Act, a new measure introduced last week
would provide increased resources and tools to enforce existing laws
against fraud and deception, set a national standard for unfair and
deceptive practices, and increase civil and criminal penalties. It would
focus on criminal behavior rather than target a specific technology.

Among vocal anti-spyware advocates are a growing number who acknowledge
the role technology can play in fighting spyware.

"There's no way we can be agile enough," said Sen. Conrad Burns, R-Mont.,
last week at a hearing of the Senate Committee on Commerce, Science and
Transportation. "I think most of the responsibility falls on the folks who
represent the different ends of the industry."

Many lawmakers, however, continue to favor provisions in Spyblock that ban
the installation of software without notice and consent from users and that
require that users be able to easily and completely remove software,
arguing that existing laws are not sufficient.

"Nobody thinks the software they produce is spyware," Sen. Barbara Boxer,
D-Calif., said at the Senate committee hearing last week. "Clearly it's
still going on even though there have been lawsuits filed."

IT managers who have to combat malicious software on a daily basis are not
waiting for lawmakers to act, although many do not object to the
initiatives in Congress.

"I don't see anything wrong with [federal anti-spyware legislation] because it keeps it in the forefront of the public," said Leland Tingle, IT director for Overseas Express, a division of Raptim International Travel, which provides discount travel services for missionaries and relief workers. "Do I think a specific law is going to help? Not really."

The Chicago-based company is as vulnerable to malicious software as any other company, Tingle said. While he supports anti-spyware initiatives in Congress for their ability to raise awareness about the gravity of the problem, Tingle said he continues to rely on firewalls and other technology to keep his network secure.

Since January, Overseas Express has been using NetOp Desktop Firewall technology from CrossTec Corp., which prevents unwanted applications and processes from executing. It allows Tingle to manage the workstations for the entire company from one central server. He can adjust security settings and halt processes centrally to stop a malicious program within moments of infection.

"When you have that many machines to baby-sit, all it takes is one attack," said Tingle, adding that these days he worries most about Trojan attacks. "I keep a pretty high line of defense."

Computer Virus Spews Right-Wing Spam

A computer virus spewed neo-Nazi-tinged spam in English and German into inboxes over the weekend.

The virus, first spotted on Thursday, sends out a blast of e-mail to addresses found on infected PCs.

Most of these messages contain links to news stories with content that "smells of right-wing political rhetoric," said Vincent Gullotto, vice president of McAfee Inc.'s antivirus emergency response team. But a small percentage contain links to a Web site that tries to infect visiting machines with the virus, he said.

Among the many messages was one with the German subject line "60 Years of Freedom: Who's Celebrating?" referencing the end of World War II. Another read: "Honorable Action" and contained a link to the Web site of the NPD, Germany's right-wing nationalist political party. One in English carried the subject: "Dresden Bombing Is To Be Regretted Enormously," referring to the Allied attack on the German city during World War II.

Other messages warned of ethnic Mafia groups and the increase in foreigners attending German schools.

The virus, called "Sober.q" by McAfee, is the 16th variant in the Germany-oriented Sober virus family that first appeared on the Internet in October 2003. Unlike earlier Sober viruses, this version isn't packaged inside an email attachment. Rather, it's being distributed by a Web site that automatically updates computers infected with the earlier, highly successful "Sober.p" variant, which began spreading on May 2.

Other variants of the Sober virus have been designed to send spam, but Gullotto said Sober.q has been much more successful than its predecessors, suggesting more such attacks could be ahead.

Software Piracy Remains Widespread

More than a third of the software installed on PCs worldwide during 2004 was pirated, with losses from unauthorized software increasing by $4 billion from 2003, according to a study released this week by the software trade group Business Software Alliance.

Thirty-five percent of all software installed on PCs was pirated, down from 36 percent in 2003, according to the study, conducted by research firm IDC.

Estimated losses from software piracy climbed, however, from $29 billion to $33 billion, as both the legal and unauthorized software markets grew from 2003 to 2004. IDC estimated that $90 billion worth of software was installed in 2004, compared to $80 billion in 2003, with sales of legal software growing 6 percent.

Countries using the most pirated software, according to IDC, are Vietnam, Ukraine, China, and Zimbabwe. Ninety percent or more of the software used in those countries was pirated during 2004, according to the BSA report. In more than half the 87 countries studied, software piracy exceeded 60 percent.

IDC estimates that 21 percent of software in the U.S. was pirated, compared to 23 percent in New Zealand, and 27 percent in the U.K. Austria and Sweden were also among the countries with the lowest software piracy rates.

A spokesperson at the Chinese embassy in the U.S. says he has not seen the study and couldn't comment on it directly. But the Chinese government investigated more than 9000 cases of intellectual property rights (IPR) infringement in 2004, says embassy spokesperson Chu Maoming. "That shows the Chinese government attaches great importance to IPR," he says of the investigations. "China has been doing a lot of work in fighting against IPR violations."

Software piracy causes a "profound economic impact" around the world, says Robert Holleyman, BSA president and chief executive officer, in a statement. Software piracy costs jobs and tax income in countries with growing software markets, he says.

For the study, IDC used proprietary statistics for software and hardware shipments, and it conducted more than 7000 interviews in 23 countries, and enlisted IDC analysts in more than 50 countries to review market conditions.

Phishers Get More Sophisticated

A technical study of phishing techniques published this week by the Honeynet Project has found that large numbers of users are still being readily tricked into visiting fake sites designed to harvest banking and financial details, despite massive efforts to educate consumers.

The study found that, far from being carried out by isolated hackers, such scams appear to be the work of highly organized groups employing huge

networks of compromised systems-called botnets-and using increasingly sophisticated techniques.

Phishing is a type of online scam that attempts to collect information such as credit card and bank account details by luring users to malicious Web sites counterfeiting those of well-known, trusted institutions. Popular targets include major banks and e-commerce sites such as eBay or PayPal. Users are typically lured to the sites via authentic-looking e-mails that appear as if they come from the institution; these are sent out in bulk from the same types of compromised systems used to host the fake sites.

Security experts have warned of a dramatic increase in phishing activity for months, but the Honeynet study offers a new level of technical detail into the workings of such scams, as well as fresh evidence of the growing scale of the problem.

The project drew its analysis from honey pots, or systems set up to present attractive targets for attackers-for instance with older operating systems that contain well-known vulnerabilities. A honey net is a large network of such systems. The study is based on analysis of multiple attacks against honey pots deployed by the German and U.K. Honeynet Projects.

Researchers said they were surprised at the ease with which hundreds of users were lured to the fake sites set up using the honey nets. A site set up on the U.K. honey net, mimicking a bank, received 265 visits in four days. The German system was used to redirect traffic to a fake site in China, and researchers observed the redirection of 721 unique IP addresses within a period of about 36 hours.

"We were surprised by how many users were apparently being tricked into accessing such content through phishing e-mails," the study said.

The way the scams were set up hinted at groups of well-organized, technically advanced scammers, researchers said. In some cases users began trying to access a site before it had been completely set up, suggesting the spam e-mails promoting the bogus site were being sent from an entirely different server. "Well-constructed and officially branded pre-built fake Web sites are routinely being deployed onto compromised servers-often targeting multiple organizations via separate 'micro sites,' with separate Web server document roots, along with the necessary tools to propagate spam e-mails to potential phishing victims," the study said.

Researchers found evidence that the scammers were making use of botnets, or large networks of remotely controlled systems, for sending spam, hosting sites or redirecting traffic. During a five-month period late in 2004, the German Honeynet Project observed 100 separate botnets. Scammers also appeared to be using intermediaries to transfer funds internationally, in order to escape detection by financial authorities.

While security professionals are well aware of the scale of phishing scams, the ordinary people targeted by the scammers often haven't even heard the term before, according to Carole Theriault, a security consultant with Sophos plc. "Phishing is essentially a con trick, it's an age-old technique using new technology," she said. "They look good, and when people see these they can't imagine that it's some guy trying to get in their pocket and get their cash."

Technical solutions can only go so far toward preventing the problem, she said. "By definition there is no malware in it. It goes after the bug in people's brains that makes them want to believe the experts," she said.

"Being vigilant is paramount in stopping this."

Netscape Launches Next-generation Web Browser

Netscape on Thursday launched version 8.0 of its Web browser, promising better security and the ability to switch between rival browsers Internet Explorer and Firefox.

Netscape was once the dominant browser but is a shadow of its former self, in terms of market share. It is owned by America Online, a division of Time Warner Inc.

Netscape 8.0 aims to restore the browser's reputation, in part by combining rival technologies. It uses the new Firefox, a collaboratively developed browser program, to handle less secure sites, and Internet Explorer, by Microsoft Corp. , to open trusted ones.

"The browser is like a hybrid car that combines the usability of Internet Explorer with the security of Firefox," said Andrew Weinstein, a spokesman for America Online/Netscape.

The new Netscape checks sites for security, integrates Web search and offers advanced features like RSS feeds, which typically link to major news providers.

Netscape 8.0 automatically switches security settings, and the browser it uses, based on whether a site is a known and trusted site or an unknown site, the company said.

If the site appears on about 150,000 Web sites certified as legitimate by TRUSTe and VeriSign Inc., called the "white list," it automatically shows up on Internet Explorer so that all the functionality of the site will work.

If the site appears on a regularly updated "black list" of dangerous and scam sites, the browser will provide a warning screen and disable potentially dangerous functionality on those sites. Users may proceed if they choose to, Weinstein said.

The millions of sites neither on the "white" or "black" list, will appear in Firefox for increased security, Weinstein said.

Since the late 1990s, Microsoft has included Explorer with the Windows operating system, a move that proved catastrophic for Netscape and sparked the U.S. Justice Department's antitrust suit against Microsoft. The two sides later settled.

America Online bought Netscape in 1999 and later merged with Time Warner in 2001. Since the mid-1990s, America Online has provided AOL subscribers a modified version of Explorer under license with Microsoft.

Firefox, a free Web browser developed by a network of software programmers, has given Internet Explorer competition for the first time since Microsoft overtook the Netscape Navigator in the late 1990s to become the dominant way computer users view the World Wide Web.

Internet Explorer continues to dominate the Web browser space, with more

than 90 percent market share according to some analysts. But by the end of 2004, Firefox's share climbed to 4.06 percent, a 34 percent gain from early November to early December alone, according to market watchers.

Google Announces Personalized Home Page

Web search leader Google Inc. on Thursday introduced a personalized Google home page, moving in a direction rivals such as Yahoo Inc. and Microsoft Corp.'s MSN portal have already been moving in.

The personalized Google home page integrates other already available Google features, such as its e-mail service Gmail, news, weather, stocks, driving directions, movie listings and the like.

While Google has long said it had no interest in becoming a portal and luring users to spend much of their Internet time on the Google site, its move on Thursday puts it in even more direct competition with Yahoo and Microsoft, among others.

The Mountain View, California-based company also said it offers a broad inclusion of content, such as the BBC, the New York Times, tech news Website Slashdot, Quote of the Day and Word of the Day.

Google's rivals in search, Yahoo and Microsoft, have long offered personalized home pages on which users can customize news, weather, stocks, television listings, movie listings and more.

Google said its personalized home page is only available now in a beta, or test, version at http://labs.google.com

Reverse Auction Feature A Hit, eBay Says

An online auction format that puts sellers into competition for individual buyers has attracted a quarter-million postings on eBay since its introduction in December, the Web marketplace said on Tuesday.

The success of the "Want it Now" feature, a reverse auction format, has led the company to explore moving the feature to its non-U.S. Web sites, said Bill Cobb, the president of North American operations for eBay Inc..

"Its initial success in the U.S. is attracting interest from our international markets," Cobb said, speaking on the sidelines of an investor conference.

Ebay has introduced features such as "Want it Now" and a haggling feature for fixed-price auctions to try to attract new buyers and sellers and grow trading volume. The company faces investor concerns that its primary markets - the United States and Germany - are heavily saturated and will be difficult to grow.

The reverse auction format has proven particularly successful in attracting new business, Cobb said. Half of all "Want It Now" postings have been matched up with sellers, he said.

Ebay introduced "Want It Now" in December, ahead of the holiday shopping season. Shoppers post requests for specific items, and sellers browse those postings, which have included everything from novelty T-shirts to a San Francisco-area strip mall.

Even with 250,000 postings, the feature remains a small fraction of eBay's total business. The auction site hosts an average of about 30 million items for sale at any given time.

Ebay has 147 million registered users, split about evenly between the United States and non-U.S. markets.

Blogs Haven't Displaced Media

Web logs, or blogs, may be a powerful new force in U.S. politics but they have not displaced traditional media in terms of information and influence, a study by the Pew Internet & American Life Project revealed on Monday.

Charting the discussion of issues during the 2004 presidential campaign, the study found political blogs - online opinion and information sites - played a similar, but not greater role, as the mainstream media in "creating buzz" around the candidates' campaigns.

The study dispels the notion that blogs are replacing traditional media as the public's primary source of information, said Michael Cornfield, a senior research consultant at Pew.

"Bloggers follow buzz as much as they make it," said Cornfield. "Our research uncovered a complicated dynamic in which a hot topic of conversation could originate with the blogs or it could originate with the media or it could originate with the campaigns.

"We can say that if people still have that idea that the bloggers are the new fifth estate, that the bloggers are the new kingmakers, that's not the case."

The study charted 40 blogs, online message boards and forums as well as newspapers and television in the last two months of the race between Republican President Bush and Democratic Sen. John Kerry.

It followed topics as they were discussed in the various outlets.

For example, it showed the Bush campaign paid more attention to an Osama bin Laden tape than did the blogs. At the same time, the Kerry campaign made more mention of missing weapons of mass destruction in Iraq than the blogs. The mainstream media made more mention of Vice President Dick Cheney's lesbian daughter than either the blogs or the campaigns.

Political bloggers' power "waxes and wanes" depending on factors like what information is available and what other outlets are doing, said Cornfield.

"What political bloggers are doing is following stories and then amplifying the hell out of them," said Dan Gimor, author of "We the Media."

The results showed blogging functions alongside traditional media, said David Sifry, a software developer at the forum.

"It's not about 'either/or.' It's about 'and,"' he said. "That's why I
still read 'The New York Times."'

U.S. to Unveil Web Site on Sex Offenders

State-by-state information on sex offenders will be available on a new
Internet site run by the federal government.

Participation by states is voluntary. The Justice Department said it hoped
to have the site up and running within two months.

The announcement by Attorney General Alberto Gonzales on Friday coincided
with National Missing Children's Day.

The site won't provide any information not already made available on the
Internet by 49 states, the District of Columbia and U.S. territories. But
it will be designed to allow someone to do a national search online to
determine whether an individual who has been convicted in one state has
moved to another.

"With this technology, every citizen and law enforcement officer will be
able to search the latest information for the identity and location of
known sex offenders," Gonzales said in a speech at the National Press Club.

Privacy advocates have been wary of publishing the names of people who
already have served their sentence.

But several recent high-profile abductions and killings, including the case
of nine-year-old Jessica Lunsford of Florida, have led to calls for widened
access to the information. "It is absolutely critical that we do better in
tracking convicted sex offenders, and establishing a publicly available
national database is a key part of that effort," said Sen. Byron Dorgan,
D-N.D.

Dorgan introduced legislation to create a national database after
authorities arrested a sex offender from Minnesota for the murder of a
woman just across the state line in North Dakota. The man would not have
been identified on North Dakota's registry, Dorgan said.

Every state but Oregon publishes the names, photos and backgrounds of at
least some people convicted of a variety of sex crimes, particularly those
involving children. But different rules apply as to what information can
be accessed.

In Florida, for example, state officials this week expanded the area that
residents can check, up to a five-mile radius from their home or school.
For years, the search could only encompass the same zip code.

The change followed the killing of Lunsford. John Couey, the man
authorities say has confessed to the crime, is a registered sex offender
who was living 150 yards from Lunsford's home in Homosassa, Fla.

In his speech and a question-and-answer session that followed, Gonzales:

_ Called for a vote on all of President Bush's judicial nominees,
dismissing a possible compromise to avert a showdown over Senate rules.

_ Urged Congress to give the FBI the power to subpoena records in terrorism investigations without the approval of a judge or jury, saying the bureau already has that power in many criminal matters. "If you can use administrative subpoenas to go after bad doctors, why can't you use them to go after terrorists?" he said.

_Said that requests for documents under the federal Freedom of Information Act "shouldn't be such a burden on agencies," but didn't take a position on legislation that would tighten FOIA compliance deadlines and levy fines on agencies that miss deadlines.

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